

Summary

In an age obsessed with online “friends” and “likes,” people are lonelier than ever. Studies show that the loneliness epidemic may have been caused by several cultural shifts, but, interestingly, the studies’ authors never mention the one key factor – an unchurched culture is a lonely culture.

The radical sharing of one another’s lives in the early church was the spontaneous reaction to Pentecost. The presence of Christ’s Spirit brings people together according to their design – the cliché is true, we *are* better together. In dramatic contrast to today’s culture that craves popularity, the Spirit-filled Christian finds joy not in accumulating friends or attracting attention but in giving oneself in friendship. This is a message about the primal, deep need for every person to be connected to others, the value of friendship in Christ, and the mystical bond Christians share in the Spirit.

Getting to Know Each Other

1. What are some of the most valuable qualities to have in a friend? Where have you seen these qualities demonstrated in your relationships? Who have been some of your closest friends throughout your life? Why?

Getting Into the Bible

⁴² And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. ⁴³ And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. ⁴⁴ And all who believed were together and had all things in common. ⁴⁵ And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. ⁴⁶ And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, ⁴⁷ praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

Background

The book of Acts can be understood as The Gospel of Luke, part 2. This book of the Bible relays how Jesus continued to work in the world after His resurrection by sending the Holy Spirit; in this way the church would be empowered to carry out the ongoing mission of Jesus together with Him.

In fact, Jesus had told His disciples the presence of the Spirit with them would be better than having Jesus Himself present in His earthly body! When Peter preached his famous Pentecost sermon the followers of Jesus could begin to see why their Master would make such a claim. Three thousand people turned to Jesus in one day! These same people began living together for Jesus and His mission. The world has never been the same.

2. Luke puts major emphasis on the early church’s shared life together. Use the following prompts to engage with this passage:
- What aspects of the church’s life does Luke appear to be especially highlighting? (i.e., what are repeated themes or words?)
 - Is there any part of the passage that seems especially surprising or foreign to you? What is the significance?
 - This passage is primarily communicating the activity and experience of the early church following the day of Pentecost. That said, we also get a glimpse into what the risen Lord Jesus was doing by His Spirit. It may be a minor theme in the passage, but it

is a major part of the wider Acts story. What does Luke say (directly or indirectly) that the Lord Himself was doing?

3. The following is a brief overview of the way the early church was sharing life together. How do these explanations help you better understand the passage? Is there any aspect you would like to pursue in your own life or together with your group?

- Apostle's Teaching: "...the teaching of the Lord communicated *through* the apostles. In due course this apostolic teaching took written shape in the NT scriptures."¹
- Breaking Bread: "...the common meals shared by the earliest disciples in their homes." (vss. 42, 46)²
- The Fellowship: "to share with someone in something"... "contributions, table fellowship, and the general friendship and unity which characterize the community."³
- The Prayers: "...probably a reference to their own appointed seasons for united prayer within the new community."⁴ Also, this may have been set prayers such as the Psalms since the phrase is "the prayers."
- Selling Goods: Making money from selling their belongings to support one another.⁵
- Attending Temple: "Solomon's Colonnade, which ran along the east side of the outer court [of the temple] is twice mentioned as the place where they actually met (3:11; 5:12)."⁶

4. The word for "fellowship" in this passage is the Greek word, "koinonia." Explore the following scripture passages to more fully capture the New Testament idea of fellowship. How would you summarize your findings?

Read 1 John 1:1-3

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life—² the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us—³ that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ.

Read Phil. 1:3-7

³ I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, ⁴ always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, ⁵ because of your partnership (fellowship) in the gospel from the first day until now. ⁶ And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. ⁷ It is right for me to feel this way about you all, because I

¹ Bruce, F.F. *The Book of Acts*. NICNT. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans. 1975. Pg., 78.

² Peterson, David G. *Acts*. PNTC. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans. 2009. Pg. 161 (Peterson differs with F.F. Bruce who reads vss. 42 and 46 as references to communion: "'The breaking of bread' here denotes something more than the ordinary partaking of food together: the regular observance of the Lords' upper is no doubt indicated." (Bruce, pg. 79) Peterson's comments, however, draw from the fact that vs. 46 seems very obviously to describe an ordinary, shared meal. The language in vs. 42 is the same as vs. 46." The ESV Study Bible suggests it was both.

³ Ibid. 160-161 (Peterson credits Hauck and Seccombe respectively for this explanation.)

⁴ Bruce, pg. 80.

⁵ "Here was no primitive form of 'communism,' but a generous response to particular problems in their midst (cf. 4:34-5). The examples given in 4:37; 5:4 show that people did not necessarily dispose of their whole estate but only certain portions of it. Believers continued to maintain their own homes and used them for the benefit of others in the church (cf. 12:12)." (Peterson, 163.)

⁶ Ibid., 163.

hold you in my heart, for you are all partakers (fellowship) with me of grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel.

Read Heb. 13:16

“But do not neglect to do good and to share (fellowship) what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.

Application

5. Take a minute to reflect on the following quotes. What resonates with you? How have you experienced these dynamics in the past? What would it look like to live in light of these words as you move forward?

“Rugged individualism, proud independence, and chosen isolation violate the nature of our existence as much as trying to breathe under water”
(Larry Crabb, *Connecting*)

“What forms and sustains Christian Community is, perhaps paradoxically, not a commitment to community per se but a commitment to the gospel Word.”
(Tim Chester & Steve Timmis, *Everyday Church*)

“We can make community and mission sound like specialized activities that belong to experts...But the Son of Man came eating and drinking. It’s not complicated. True, it’s not always easy – it involves people invading your space or going to places where you don’t feel comfortable. But it’s not complicated. If you share a meal three or four times a week and you have a passion for Jesus, then you will be building up the Christian community and reaching out in mission.”
(Tim Chester, *A Meal with Jesus*)

6. There is a relationship between our friendships and the social context for those same relationships. How do these sociological dynamics outlined by Nelson Searcy in his book, *Activate* inform your expectations? Are there any ways in which you would qualify or disagree with these claims?

The Four Spaces of Spiritual Growth

- Public Space
 - 20 people or more; 12 feet between people w/ little contact
 - Lecturer or speaker may be focal point
 - Corporate worship, malls, concerts, sporting events
- Social Space
 - 5-20 people; 4-12 feet from each other
 - People know your name; most don’t know your personal business
 - Facilitator or leader takes place of teacher/lecturer
 - Break room, fun event at church, hanging out with buddies.
- Personal Space
 - 2-5 people with 18 inches to 4 feet between people
 - Everyone in personal space will know more about you than your name
 - Friends and peers negate need for facilitator or teacher
 - Best friends on a park bench, road trips, small coffee tables, personal conversation that is more private.
- Intimate Space
 - Only 1 other person

Sermon Series: More Blessed
Message 4: More Blessed to be a Friend than to be Befriended
Text: Acts 2:42-47

Pastor Alan Wright
April 29, 2018
Reynolda Church, EPC

- Space is less than 18 inches
- This person knows your secrets and knows you better than anyone else in the world.
- Romantic destinations, private dinners, any space geared toward personal communication.

7. Studies show that we are an increasingly isolated society? How are you being impacted by these dynamics? What are the most connected and relationally fulfilling times of your week? When are you feeling alone in unhealthy ways? How can your group pray for you and help?